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## Review of the Forensic Science Examinations Embodied in the Warren Commission Report (A Panel Discussion) \*

### Introductory Remarks \*\*

*Charles A. McInerney, A.B.\*\*\* Moderator, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

[ In the view of many, the American Academy of Forensic Sciences would be remiss if it failed to treat this timely topic, The Forensic Science Examinations Embodied in the Warren Commission Report. It is the opportunity to evaluate the workings of a fact-finding body in a case which is familiar to all. More important, it is an opportunity to study the workings of a commission that had the unique opportunity to investigate a sequence of criminal activities under the optimum condition of unlimited resources in personnel and facilities. The whole of the talents in academic and technical communities of the country, as well as the services of federal agencies, were available to it.

For purposes of this panel discussion it is assumed that all of those present have better than a cursory knowledge of the events surrounding the assassination of President Kennedy. Valuable time, therefore, will not be utilized with a chronological summation. Nor will time be spent in discussing those problems, such as protection and security, which do not fit comfortably into the normal province of this Academy.

The panelists have made an evaluation of the report from the perspectives of their separate disciplines. The approach

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\*\*\* Director, Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Crime Laboratory, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

is academic; therefore, disciplined. There is no specific purpose to impugn the judgment of the Warren Commission, or to undermine the United States government, or to encourage any extremist views of conspiracy.

This is a critique by panelists, all of whom are well qualified in the areas explored in their discussions. In those instances where the participants treat their subject harshly, these should be recognized as natural consequences of learned, objective studies, totally consistent with the aims of the Academy to advance the application of forensic sciences. In fact, the nature of this symposium is not appreciably different than some presented in former years where real case situations provided the basis for panel discussions and mock trials.

Some of the questions to be considered are: Was everything done that could have been done? Was anything done that should not have been done? Were the "expert" witnesses truly expert? Should additional independent witnesses have been consulted?

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## THE WARREN COMMISSION: Report and Hearings\*

A Commentary on Issues of Importance in the Study  
of Investigation and Criminalistics

*James W. Osterburg, MPA\*\**

The literature of criminal investigation is sparse indeed. For this reason alone the Warren Commission Report is a document of landmark proportions. However, the inherent importance of the inquiry and the not inconsiderable sum spent by the government to consummate the investigation are other aspects that contribute to its significance. Since the report is based on a procedure which is neither pure criminal investigation, a trial, or other regular judicial process, it affords an opportunity to examine the nature of the investigative function and to inquire whether the means chosen were the best of the possible alternatives. In the sub-specialties of forensic science: pathology, criminalistics, questioned documents, and psychiatry, the printed testimony reveals the state of expertise that was available at the time for this—the most demanding homicide investigation ever undertaken. A close reading of the testimony of some of the experts utilized, at least in criminalistics, suggests that there are some areas in which the basic research necessary for the objective evaluation of evidence has yet to be performed. In short, the Warren Commission Report is a document of primary importance to those who are seriously engaged in the study of the investigative process.

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